

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at [www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete).

## **FULL MILITARY RETIRED PAY AND COMPENSATION FOR TOTAL SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITY BASED ON INDIVIDUAL UNEMPLOYABILITY**

Under the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 (PL 110-181) qualified military retirees who have been awarded VA service-connected disability compensation at the 100 percent rate based on Individual Unemployability (IU) are entitled to be paid both compensation and military retirement pay as of January 1, 2005. However, the law specifically provides that full payment can not be made until after October 1, 2008.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 established Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP), effective January 1, 2004. This program is administered and paid by DoD and it is intended to phase out the offset of military retirement pay for VA disability compensation over a 10-year period. A retiree may qualify if he or she has a combined disability evaluation of at least 50 percent and is retired from the military for length of service, or for disability with at least 20 years active service.

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2005 eliminated the 10-year phase-out for those individuals rated 100 percent disabled by the VA Rating Schedule and they became eligible to receive all of their formerly offset military retired pay effective January 1, 2005.

The National Defense Authorization Act for 2006 provided that when a veteran was evaluated as totally disabled due to Individual Unemployability, full restoration of the military retirement pay could not be made until October 1, 2009. This was changed by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, which made these retirees eligible to receive all of their formerly offset military retired pay retroactive to January 1, 2005, to be paid after October 1, 2008.

Retirees need not request this retroactive benefit. VA and The Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS) are performing a data match that will identify the veterans that are affected. After October 1, 2008, DFAS will automatically begin making the payments and notify VA of its portion to pay in cases where VA compensation was withheld in lieu of military retired pay after January 1, 2005.

## **VA RAISING HOME LOAN CEILINGS IN MANY AREAS**

(VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will use a locality-based approach in raising ceilings on its guaranteed home loans from the current \$417,000 to as much as \$729,000. The increases are effective immediately under legislation recently enacted with President Bush signing the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008.

That law also improved VA's Specially Adapted Housing Program. It raises primary grants from \$50,000 to \$60,000 toward constructing a new home or modifying an existing home to meet adaptive needs of veterans or active duty servicemembers with certain service-connected disabilities.

One new feature is a provision in the law that will assist burn victims. It will allow veterans with certain service-connected disabilities resulting from severe burns to receive the adaptive housing grants. The new law also makes future increases in ceilings on the Specially Adapted Housing Program automatic.

The increased limits in the general home loan program for all veterans' home purchases or construction will be based on local housing costs, tied to the similar locality adjustments of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp., "Freddie Mac."

VA-guaranteed home loans are available for veterans to purchase or construct single-family homes, and to purchase condominiums or cooperative apartments. There are about 2.3 million existing VA home loans, more than 90 percent made with no down payment.

More information about VA home loans and adaptive grants is available from VA at 877-827-3702 or [www.homeloans.va.gov](http://www.homeloans.va.gov).

**ECONOMIC STIMULUS PAYMENTS** The deadline for filling a tax return for 2007 to receive an Economic Stimulus Payment is October, 15, 2008. Persons who had no taxable income in 2007 but who received VA benefit

payments may eligible to receive the payment. To be eligible a person must have, or his or her family has, at least \$3,000 in qualifying income from, or in combination with, Social Security benefits, certain Veterans Affairs benefits, Railroad Retirement benefits and earned income. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) does not count as qualifying income for the stimulus payment.

For those who do not normally file a tax return, the IRS has prepared an 8-page informational package that includes instructions, a sample Form 1040A and a blank Form 1040A — everything needed to file a tax form. The package can be downloaded from <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/k1040a3.pdf>. Assistance is available from the IRS hotline at 1-866-234-2942.

**VA ANNOUNCES NEW NURSING ACADEMY SITES** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON -- To provide compassionate, highly-trained nurses to serve the health care needs of the nation's veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is establishing new partnerships with seven of the country's finest nursing schools. The partnerships will bring to 10 the number of collaborations between the Department and nursing schools under the VA Nursing Academy.

The VA Nursing Academy is a virtual organization with central administration in Washington. It expands learning opportunities for nursing students at VA facilities, funds additional faculty positions so competitively selected nursing school partners will accept additional baccalaureate-level students, and increases recruitment and retention of VA nurses. The five-year, \$40 million program began in 2007.

Seven nursing schools will form new partnerships with nine VA medical centers and join the VA Nursing Academy this year. Included is the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa with the University of South Florida. Partnerships already in the VA Nursing Academy include the Malcolm Randall VA Medical Center in Gainesville with the University of Florida.

VA's "Enhancing Academic Partnerships" pilot program enables competitively selected VA-nursing school partnerships to expand the number of nursing faculty, enhance the professional and scholarly development of nurses, increase student enrollment by about 1,000 students and promote innovations in nursing education.

Further information about the pilot program can be obtained from VA's Office of Academic Affiliations web site at [www.va.gov/oaa](http://www.va.gov/oaa).

#### **IMPORTANT DATES IN SEPTEMBER**

**September 1** Federal holiday – Labor Day

**September 8** last day to input change of address or establish direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-2008 payments

**September 22** last day to change or cancel direct deposit on compensation and pension awards in time for the 10-01-

#### **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

##### **SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)  
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

**VA Health Revenue Service** (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023  
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

##### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740  
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846  
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit** - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

##### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

**VA Web Site:** [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)** [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**

[www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete](http://www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete)

**Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):** [www.ocwen.com](http://www.ocwen.com)

**Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs:** [www.floridavets.org](http://www.floridavets.org)

**"Florida Vets First:"** [www.FloridaVetsFirst.com](http://www.FloridaVetsFirst.com)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)